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E Z E M V E L O
K Z N W I L D L I F E

Conservation, Partnerships & Ecotourism

Royal Natal National Park **HIKES**

The Thukela
Gorge Walk

Compiled by Jenny Bester
Honorary Officer RNNP

The Thukela Gorge Walk

Distance: About 13 km for the round trip depending on how far you want to go! Three hours there, two and a half back at a brisk pace!

Degree of difficulty: Moderate. A long gentle walk

For the fit: A long walk with a gentle gradient and boulder hopping at the end

For the not-so-fit: go as far as is comfortable. The view of the Escarpment is well worthwhile.

From the Mahai campsite, drive back towards the Visitors Centre and turn to the right at the dam. This takes you to the Thukela Car Park, where the walk begins. Your car will be safe with the community guard; please tip him as this is an unpaid service. Follow the signs to the Gorge. The path is quite clear, as this is a popular walk. There is really lovely scenery along the way with the flat Amphitheatre coming rapidly closer. Towards the end of the walk you go through

a few patches of indigenous forest. A kilometre or so further you come to the beginning of the Gorge and a boulder hop up to the Tunnel. Explore the Tunnel when the water level is low (winter and early spring). Climb the ladder on the left side of the Gorge to take you to the Tunnel cave - it's a short climb of about 10 minutes, and the view of the Thukela Falls is spectacular. Climb the longer ladder on the right-hand side and follow the path - after a serious squeeze of a climb up a fissure the path takes you round the boulders that have blocked the river and joins the river on the other side. Make sure you take the paths bearing left and downwards after the top of the fissure or you will end up mountaineering on top of the Sentinel Ridgeline! On reaching the river, boulder hop on to where the scenery becomes very beautiful.

Be careful in summer as rainstorms can bring the river down in flood and it can become dangerous as there is very little place for escape because the banks are steep! If you keep right at the junctions you can reach the bottom of the Thukela Falls - but be careful of your time limitation as you must be back before dark.

Please remember Do's and Don't

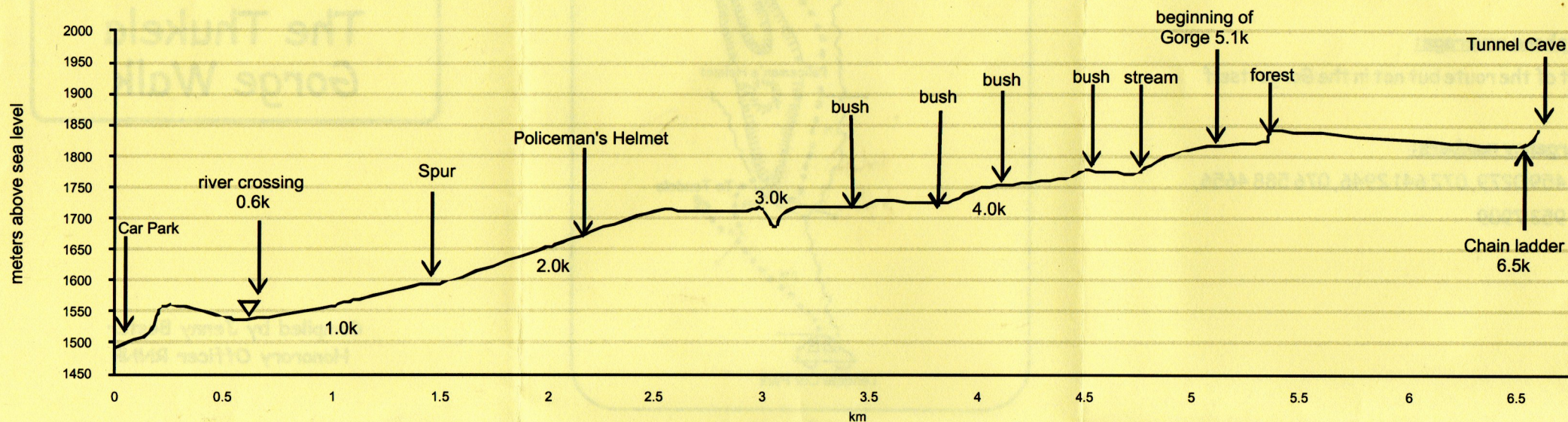
Don't

- Feed animals
- Litter
- Make your own path
- Light fires or throw away cigarette butts
- Pick vegetation
- Kill an animal - including fish (unless you have a permit)
- Make an unnecessary noise
- Touch bushman paintings

Do

- Tell someone where you are going
- Stick to the route you say you will take
- Stay on the path
- Be back before nightfall
- Take a basic first aid kit
- Always take water
- Take appropriate clothing - especially a raincoat in summer and warm clothes in winter
- Take a cell phone if you have one
- Please sign the mountain register

Profile: Gorge Walk



Special interest

Scenery:

Policeman's Helmet on the right hand ridge half way along the route and, of course, the world renowned Amphitheatre that dominates the walk. The Thukela Falls can be seen tucked away on the right hand side of the Amphitheatre, at 948 metres it is the second highest waterfall in the world.

Plants:

The Protea veld, blue squills in spring and the unusual tree ferns

Birds:

Drakensberg Prinia a little songster found only in this region

Animals:

Baboons are often seen feeding, especially near the Tendele Camp. The remains of otters' scat, which looks like finely broken eggshell, are sometimes seen on the path

Cell phone coverage:

Most of the route but not in the Gorge itself

Emergency numbers:

082 459 0279, 072 641 2946, 076 588 4656,
072 953 7909

